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ABSTRACT

This paper describes early issues, events, and efforts in New Hampshire to develop a telecommunications base for students and educators. Six "dreams" of possible telecommunications programs are briefly described, some facts about New Hampshire are provided, and some problems to be addressed are considered. The beginnings of the New Hampshire telecommunications network are then described from its start in 1980 to the 1986-87 school year, which brought focused efforts by the New Hampshire Association of Computer Education Statewide (NHACES), workshops by the New Hampshire Association of Computer Coordinators, and the establishment of a statewide Educational Telecommunications Planning Group. An update indicates that subsequent to 1986, New Hampshire's state education agency installed the EdLink pilot project, thus taking the first step toward creating a statewide telecommunications link for education. (EW)

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New Hampshire: A Case Study

Getting Started in Educational Telecommunications

Molly Watt and Dan Watt

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Some Dreams for New Hampshire Educators and Students

Dream #1: Establish a forum or network of forums for New Hampshire educators to exchange ideas, electronic mail, curriculum resources, and technical help. Models are Telecue on CompuServe, the IBM Model Schools Forum on CompuServe, and EMSIE.

Dream #2: Hold a parallel conference via telecommunications for the New Hampshire Association of Computer Education Statewide (NHACES) Annual Conference. This will allow teachers to attend in their own school districts, enabling participation by more than the 300 attendees and cutting down on travel costs. This format is similar to the World Logo Conference on-line, and serves as a model for future state conferences.

Dream #3: Use desktop publishing software, the Apple Macintosh® computer, and a modem to produce the NHACES newsletter, the New Hampshire Association of Computer Coordinators (NHACC) newsletter, and newsletters created by other educational organizations and by students. These can also be made available on-line.

Dream #4: Pilot a program at Thayer High School in Winchester, New Hampshire, to increase cooperation among parents, teachers, and students. Thayer High School was the second school in the nation to join Dr. Theodore Sizer's Coalition for Essential Schools. The predominantly rural, working-class community has the highest dropout rate in the state. In this program 150 microcomputers with modems would be placed in homes to allow students, parents, and teachers to monitor projects and assignments and to communicate with each other. This would create an entirely different relationship between home and school. A homework hotline would allow students to get on-line coaching from teachers and peers in completing homework.

Dream #5: Link science students in a statewide network to monitor and share information on acid rain, perhaps linking up with KIDNET, a network based at Technical Education Research Centers (TERC) in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Students could begin to see themselves as scientists contributing to the data base of information required to make the decisions necessary to preserve life.

Dream #6: Enable New Hampshire students to communicate directly with students in other states and countries as pen pals and on forums. Using as models the World Youth Peace Initiative and the International Penpals Program, this program would extend the educational context for students who have never traveled outside New Hampshire.

Some Facts about New Hampshire

New Hampshire is a rural state with 180,000 students and 58 regional school districts. Schools are generally small and educators are isolated from each other and from immediate access to information, resources, help, and models.

New Hampshire is a comparatively small state in terms of both population and area. This facilitates the project of linking educators and evaluating the effects on schools, learning, and professional development.

New Hampshire Governor John Sununu, a former engineering professor, is aggressively promoting technology in the classroom as a means of upgrading the school system. This approach has put New Hampshire in the public eye as a model for other states.

New Hampshire has organized politically and educationally with a focus on telecommunications as a partial solution to improving educational delivery.

Some Problems to Address

Getting started. This entails having an image of what is possible and what is to be gained.

Getting hardware, including a modem. This requires educating those who write and approve purchase orders.

Choosing software that is inexpensive and easy to use, for communicating with other computers and systems.

Choosing or creating a network, a bulletin board, or data base.

Getting a telephone line to use in school (which turns out to be nontrivial!).

Having a system to help new users through the difficulties once they get on-line, so that they do not become discouraged.

Finding a way to pay the connect-time and long-distance charges. (Most calls to telecommunications nodes in New Hampshire are long-distance.)

Creating enough value to keep users accessing regularly, despite the costs and difficulties involved.

Ensuring equal access to students and teachers, regardless of their socio-economic group or sex.

Gathering Momentum for Telecommunications

1980
Educators created a statewide organization, NHACES, to facilitate leadership, training, and communication about educational computing among teachers and decision makers in order to put appropriate technology in classrooms.

Anne Knight, NHACES president, trained members of the NHACES Board to use the DEC PDP-10 at the University of New Hampshire as a host for electronic mail and communication about educational computing. Most members never accessed the system. (In 1986, three board members used UNH's VAX Notes to communicate regularly.)

1985
SpecialNet was placed in each school district so that special ed coordinators could access information and communicate with others.

Monadnock Logo Users, a special-interest group of NHACES, accessed Logo Forums on CompuServe during several meetings. Confer, an MTS system at University of Michigan, was used by members to participate in the Logo Forum and the LIFT network.

Jack Taube gave the dinner speech at the NHACES Annual Meeting, inspiring members with the possibilities for educators to collaborate across distances.

As part of her task when nominated as First Vice President, Molly Watt took on the responsibility of increasing awareness in New Hampshire about the potential of telecommunications for educators.

The NHACES Board cosponsored a local site for the World Logo Conference at Keene State College. The conference at Keene was linked to more than a dozen sites around the world. This pilot project was inspirational to educators across the state.

In October, NHACES supported board member Michael Goldsmith in starting NHACC, a special-interest group that needed a statewide professional network. Telecommunications became one of its first targets of study.

NHACES began to use desktop publishing to produce its quarterly newsletter. PageMaker software was purchased and members began to learn to upload files via modem to the editor's computer. This was a first step toward putting the newsletter itself on-line as part of a statewide telecommunications link-up. NHACC followed suit with its newsletter.

1986

The annual conference presented two sessions using telecommunications: Steve Weisman of Plymouth State College demonstrated SpecialNet, and Watt, Stavely, and Watt presented a session on Telecommunications for Teachers.

Half the board members of the NHACES began using CompuServe for communications on NHACES business.

The Executive Board of NHACES chose telecommunications as its focus for the 1986–87 year. A goal was set to run a parallel telecommunications conference during the annual conference in February, 1987. Cochairpersons were appointed for the parallel conference. Governor John Sununu launched a $5 million initiative focused on technology "to leverage the capacity of teachers as professionals." His program has three target areas: The Gifted and Talented, Computers for Teachers, and Technology in the Classroom. The latter was reported to include telecommunications as part of its original intent. However, Dr. Otis Sproul, the committee chairman, requested proposals for interactive videodisc projects only.

The NHACC sponsored its second workshop, at which Governor Sununu spoke on the Governor's Initiatives for Excellence in Education. The program also included a small-group discussion on telecommunications, and demonstrations by vendors of telecommunications software. Alan November, keynote speaker, invited New Hampshire educators to access the French River Teacher's Center (Massachusetts) bulletin board.

A statewide Educational Telecommunications Planning Group was established. The group, which includes representatives from the Governor's Initiative, the State of New Hampshire, NHACES, NHACC, SpecialNet, the Regional Center for Educational Training, and the French River Teacher's Center, is exploring the feasibility of getting educators across the state on-line. Major questions for the group include defining a purpose for the system and deciding which educators should participate at the start. Anne Knight is exploring ways to cooperate with the Maine Computer Consortium, which now has an electronic bulletin board. She also intends to put together a statewide "dog-and-pony show" to motivate teachers.

NHACC held its third workshop, sponsored by Apple Computer, with a focus on telecommunications integrated into the curriculum. Apple offered computer coordinators and their school districts the chance to apply for Macintosh-based AppleLink license agreements and AppleLink Macintosh bundles "at a considerable discount." Four districts have already made this commitment.

NH Lab Assistance Center, a division of the Northeast Regional Educational Lab, put in place the NH Labnet—a FIDO bulletin board that teachers can access to get up-to-date information on issues, events, and resources, and to communicate with other teachers.

The Annual Meeting of NHACES, offered two workshops: Beginning Telecommunications and Advanced Telecommunications. The keynote address, "Mindlinks," by Molly Watt, will introduce the context for the NHACES focus on telecommunications.

Editor's Update

In their paper, Molly Watt and Dan Watt describe early issues, events, and efforts to establish a telecommunications base in the state of New Hampshire. The Watts' chronology ends in 1986, with their "dreams" for New Hampshire educators and students as yet unfulfilled.

Subsequently, New Hampshire's state education agency installed the EdLink pilot project. With this statewide on-line system, the Watts' dreams are beginning to come true.

Molly Watt and Dan Watt

Molly Watt and Dan Watt are educational consultants, authors, lecturers, and teacher trainers who travel widely in their work, most recently as part of a team delivering four weeks of training and an Apple Lab to educators at the Curriculum and Materials Research and Training Institute and the People's Education Press in Beijing, China.

They work regularly as consultants at the Educational Development Center's Center for Learning Technology. They also share a half-time position as computer coordinator at Thayer High School in Winchester, New Hampshire, in order to stay grounded in the "real world" of students and schools. They are currently co-authoring a handbook on educational telecommunications with Dr. Gerri Sinclair of Simon Fraser University.

Ms. Watt is vice president of NHACES and editor of its quarterly newsletter. She is convenor of the NH Educational Telecommunications Planning Group.